

## Friendship Within The Church

Cultivating Godly Friendships

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The subject of my part of the split sermon today is friendship because I earnestly believe that friendship is a crucial part of our development, together within God's church, and we need to understand that simple term clearly.

We are to have the mind of Jesus Christ in us, and just how well we understand our relationships to each other, as well as to those who will come after us, is of vital importance to thinking and acting just like our elder brother, Jesus Christ. It should be one of our goals to understand more about how to become a real friend to someone, and just what that term means to each of us, especially in context of the close bond of our friendship within God's church.

But as I researched the subject, both in terms of what the Bible had to say, and what men apart from the Bible had to say, I realized that a truly profitable message on the subject would take much more time than time permits today. Then I read something, which we will look at in a bit, that made me change my focus of what we need to consider in this message as perhaps the single most important truth for us about friends and friendship.

Throughout the last couple of years of campaigning for the presidency, each of the candidates became known more or less for certain idiosyncrasies in their speeches, debates, or mannerisms.

Senator McCain used the term "friends" so frequently that it was always part of any parody of him. He was constantly referring to whomever he was addressing as "my friend" or "my friends" and it made me wonder if there was any real sense of sincerity in the term for him, or was it merely a political gimmick. His constant use of the term also made me fondly remember the day when Herbert Armstrong would always end so many of his broadcasts of the truth of God's Word with the closing, "Good-bye friends."

What does friendship really mean? What must one do to be considered a friend?

That recent article suggested that Senator McCain's use of the term "my friends" was his attempt to form the same emotional bond of attachment that William Jennings Bryant evoked in the 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. That speech has been called "one of the most viscerally powerful speeches

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ever made by an American politician," with one *New York World* journalist reporting the crowd's reaction as "tumultuous hills and valleys of shrieking men and women."

An important part of that speech is the way that Bryant, one of the greatest American orators who ever lived, used that term 'my friends' ten times, interweaving it with biblical imagery to draw all the delegates there into an emotional unity.

The speech concerned an important debate in the United States that was being inappropriately influenced by worldwide opinion. It concerned the volatile issue of moving the United States economy from the solely Gold Standard to Bimetallism and standardizing the value of the dollar to silver. But by the end of the speech, William Jennings Bryant had used that term "friends" to create an emotional bond that culminated with an image of all righteous men banding together with the same fervor of an American Revolution against the tyrants who would crucify mankind on the Gold Standard.

I want to read to you a few excerpts from that speech because I want us to get a sense of how powerful this word "friend" can be when it is manipulated like Bryant did in his speech.

Bryant said,

I would be presumptuous, indeed, to present myself against the distinguished gentlemen to whom you have listened if this were a mere measuring of abilities, but this is not a contest between persons. The humblest citizen in all the land, when clad in the armor of a righteous cause, is stronger than all the hosts of error. I come to speak to you in defense of a cause as holy as the cause of liberty—the cause of humanity.

Ah, my friends, we say not one word against those who live upon the Atlantic coast, but the hardy pioneers who have braved all the dangers of the wilderness, who have made the desert to blossom as the rose. . .

He continues on:

And now, my friends, let me come to the paramount issue. If they ask us why it is that we say more on the money question than we say upon the tariff question, I reply that, if protection has slain its thousands, the gold standard

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has slain its tens of thousands.

It is very interesting how he used the biblical images within his speech.

Mr. Carlisle said in 1878 that this was a struggle between "the idle holders of idle capital" and "the struggling masses, who produce the wealth and pay the taxes of the country." And, my friends, the question we are to decide is: Upon which side will the Democratic party fight; upon the side of "the idle holders of idle capital" or upon the side of "the struggling masses?"

Further down he says,

No, my friends, the verdict will never be that we will give up our rights, that we will fight again as we did for independence. Therefore, we care not upon what lines the battle is drawn. . .

The whole point of this was that he drew an emotional frenzy around his consideration that they were all his friends.

I read these excerpts to you because I wanted you to see this great example of a bond that developed in the name of friendship and sacrifice supposedly, but that was nothing more than stirring the emotions to act together for political expediency!

Is this the friendship that we should seek? Do we believe that true God-based friendship should be an emotional appeal like this, merely because we are part of a cause together that we are friends?

I would like to go now to a very familiar scripture.

**Proverbs 18:24** A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

This is an interesting scripture, because on the surface it merely seems to tell us that to be a friend you need to be friendly. But in fact it is a clear warning to us from God about proper friendship. The King James, and the New King James, have poor translations of this verse and, as you will see in a minute, some of the other translations give us a

much clearer picture.

We will begin by going through the first part of the verse: "A man that has friends must show himself friendly."

According to E.W. Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, there is even some controversy over the first word of the verse as written in the Hebrew. Many have said, including Bullinger, that the first Hebrew word in the sentence has been improperly understood to be *ish* which means a man rather than *yesh* which means, "there is," or "there are."

Then, concerning the word "friends," according to Strong's, it is the Hebrew word *re'a* (*ray'ah*) which can mean brother, companion, friend, fellow, neighbor. It can mean many kinds of common relationships and could include the common cause friendship that Bryant strove to form in his "Cross of Gold" speech. But the most interesting part of this verse comes with the next series of words, "shows himself to be friendly."

According to the research I did, there is a great deal of controversy about the exact translation of this part of the verse. What we read in the King James as, "must show himself friendly," actually seems to read in the Hebrew, "who breaks in pieces!"

*The Companion Bible* translates this first part of the verse as, "There are friends that rend us. . ."

*The Amplified Bible* says, "A friend of all the world will prove himself a bad friend. . ."

*The New International Version* says, "A man of many friends may come to ruin. . ."

*The American Standard* says, "He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction. . ."

*The New Living Translation* says, "There are friends who destroy each other. . ."

*The English Standard* says, "A man of many companions may come to ruin. . ."

*The James Moffatt* says, "There are friends who only bring you loss. . ."

*The Adam Clarke Commentary* says about this section of verse 24:

There is a kind of factitious (or artificial) friendship in the world, that, to show oneself friendly in it, is very expensive, and in every way utterly unprofitable:

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it is maintained by expensive parties, feasts, etc., where the table groans with dainties, and where the conversation is either insipid, or calumnious; backbiting, tale bearing, and scandal, being the general topics of the different squads of company.

This is the world's view of a friendship.

As we look at the second part of Proverbs 18:24: ". . . but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." We see that the word used for friend here is different than the first part of the verse. This word is a'hab (aw-hab') and it is the same word that we see used in both II Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8, to describe Abraham's relationship with God, as God's friend. This same Hebrew word is translated friend(s) nine times, but is translated as "love," "loves," or "loved," two hundred times. The word is different in that it gives the sense of a binding loyalty and affection!

Adding to the meaning of this relationship is the term translated, "sticks closer." The word is da'beq (daw-bake') and it means, "cleave, joining, stick closer." This then adds to the emphasis of a relationship that is so close it signifies an intense affection and loyalty.

Barnes Notes says this about verse 24:

A man of many companions is so to his own destruction, but there is a friend (the true, loving friend) etc. It is not the multitude of so called friends that helps us. They may only embarrass and perplex. What we prize is the one whose love is stronger and purer even than all ties of kindred.

Adam Clarke in his writing about the second half of the verse says, "In many cases the genuine friend has shown more attachment, and rendered greater benefits, than the natural brother."

And then in his final comment on the whole verse he says, "The former will continue during prosperity, but the latter continues closely united to his friend, even in the most disastrous circumstances."

If you would like to see a good example of this closely bonded relationship, read through chapters 18, 19, and 20 of I Samuel, and see how Jonathan stood by his friend and helped David in some of the worst of times—a true friend.

**I Samuel 18:1** Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

It was important to spend this time here on this verse because I consider it a vital direction, from God to us, regarding our relationships with one another in an era where time is of the essence in establishing the affectionate bonds of fidelity, honesty, and self-sacrifice among those within the body of Christ. True and lasting friendship needs to be based on the true understanding available to us only through Jesus Christ.

As I said at the beginning of this message, the topic of friendship is huge and an important subject to be tackled and understood by those who desire to have the mind of God. There are many aspects of friendship, being a friend, having a friend, identifying false friends that we need to understand, especially in the way that we interact with those God has not yet called because we need to act like God does.

But I would now like to focus this subject down to the most important aspect of our friendship among God's people—the source!

What is the source of our primary friendship that will produce every other relationship, all of the other relationships will hang on this? Of course, as members of the church, your answer would be God. But do you really believe that, and if you do, what are you doing about it?

**John 15:12-17** This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.

Here, then, is the source of real friendship! Our friendship with Jesus Christ, through our calling and exposure to the truth, should bind us together with the same bond of affection in friendship to one another as it does with us to Him. This is the friendship that we read about in the second part of Proverbs 18:24, which will take all the work but give

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us the opportunity to have the proper relationships in all the other aspects of our lives. It is the truth that draws us together as friends, but it takes a tremendous amount of effort to make it grow.

I told you at the beginning that I read something that changed my mind about the focus of this. It was a story about the forming of the lifelong bond in friendship, which Helen Keller developed with her teacher, Anne Sullivan.

I would like to read to you Helen Keller's account of the breakthrough in that relationship that would grow to produce a woman who contributed more to those around her than most others ever do. I want you to see what that key moment produced!

She wrote:

The most important day I remember in all my life is the one on which my teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, came to me. I am filled with wonder when I consider the immeasurable contrasts between the two lives it connects. It was the third of March, 1887, three months before I was seven years old. . .

Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward a shore with plummet and sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbor was.

'Light! Give me Light!' was the wordless cry of my soul, and the light of love shone on me that very hour! I felt approaching footsteps. I stretched out my hand as I supposed to my mother. Someone took it, and I was caught up and held close in the arms of her who had come to reveal all things to me, and, more than all things, to love me.

The morning after my teacher came she led me into her room and gave me a doll. The little blind children at the Perkins Institute had sent it and Laura Bridgman had dressed it: but I did not know this until afterward. When I had played with it a little while, Miss Sullivan slowly spelled into my hand the word "d-o-l-l". I was at once interested in this finger play and tried to imitate it. When I finally succeeded in making the letters correctly I was flushed with childish pleasure and pride. Running downstairs to my mother I held up my hand and made the letters for doll. I did not know that I was spelling a word

or even that words existed; I was simply making my fingers go in monkey-like imitation. In the following days I learned to spell in this uncomprehending way a great many words.

One day, while I was playing with my new doll, Miss Sullivan put my big rag doll into my lap also, spelled "d-o-l-l" and tried to make me understand that "d-o-l-l" applied to both. Earlier in the week we had had a tussle over the words "m-u-g" and "w-a-t-e-r." Miss Sullivan had tried to impress on me that "m-u-g" was mug and "w-a-t-e-r" was water, but I persisted in confounding the two. In despair she had dropped the subject for the time, only to renew it at the first opportunity. I became impatient at her repeated attempts and, seizing the new doll, I dashed it upon the floor. I was keenly delighted when I felt the fragments of the broken doll at my feet. Neither sorrow nor regret followed my passionate outburst. I had not loved the doll. In the still, dark world in which I lived there was no strong sentiment or tenderness. I felt my teacher sweep the fragments to one side of the hearth, and I had a sense of satisfaction that the cause of my discomfort was removed. She brought me my hat, and I knew I was going out into the warm sunshine. This thought, if a wordless sensation may be called a thought, made me hop and skip with pleasure.

We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free. There were barriers still, it is true but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and

sorrow!

Brethren, this is what has happened to us. God has called us out of this world of a ship blinded in the fog, ready to flounder on the rocks, into the truth of how things really work. The truth of God not only brings clarity but it eventually produces the fruit of true friendship in love. But it takes a great deal of work and the work has to start right here, right now, within the home of the brethren of God.

In the book of James we are shown that there will be many different kinds of people called into God's church, and all these people will have different prerequisites for what satisfies their own needs for friendship. But James goes to great lengths to show that our friendships, within the family of God, must go beyond our own self interests and we must work to not only be the true friend of God, but of one another. He has opened our mind to the true nature of the bond of friendship, and now it is up to us to perfect it according to His Word.

We often fall into the trap of judging one another based on what fits into our own prerequisites for friendship. But God tells us that only by working to sacrifice our own feelings of things to the truth of God will we develop the real and lasting friendship.

**James 2:19-24** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

How hard are we working to develop real friendship where it is most important together in the house of God, in the body of Christ?

This next passage is an important scripture for us to consider:

**Malachi 3:16** Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.

God's people were in communication, but they were also being listened to in how they reacted to each other. We are being judged on how well and how closely our friendship, through the truth of God, is with each other.

**Psalm 119:63** I am a companion [a friend] of all who fear you, and of those who keep Your precepts.

True friendship with Jesus Christ, and each other, only happens and becomes stronger over years of faithfully believing and living the truth together. This takes consistent dedication and self-sacrifice towards God and each other. This is the friendship that goes through the grave and into the resurrection for eternity! This is the friendship that at the end of each broadcast, Herbert Armstrong knew that he was saying to all of those out there that heard the truth that made them friends with Jesus and would spend their lives trying to keep it. And that truth was that Jesus is the friend of those who do the things that He says, and He is our friend and we are His friend, and we must be each other's friend.

To everyone out there, I would like to say the same thing as Mr. Armstrong used to say at the end of his broadcast, and that we can say to each other, and that Jesus Christ says to us, "Goodbye friends."